

An Alternative to Wasted Time, Non-Payment of Debt to Society & Reparations Left Unrepaired

By Joe Catlan

When one considers the vast resources deployed to process, monitor, evaluate, try, guard, medicate, and provide recreational options to arrested accused offenders, which would all be completed at the idyllic point when a person is sanctioned, we tend to be understandably hesitant to allow a low bar for the release, pending the aforementioned, of those accused of more heinous crimes and recurrent offenders. For them, and all to be sure, the housing, food, water, plumbing and electricity to maintain them necessarily begins upon arrest. Beginning with the last expense listed, what follows is a proposal for a sensible alternative to the particular sanction of serving time, which, as class has shown, turns out to be a terrible waste of time as recidivism, gang recruitment, and surely other maladies permeate the purported goal of rehabilitation, pending release. Though admittedly this author's study of the criminal justice system is limited to this course and an acquired knowledge of it, unlike most of our other institutions (economic, governmental, societal), which surely could use some tweaking, it is this particular institution which seemingly needs to be weeded out, stem and root. Rather than "serving" time, put them all on an electricity producing stationary bike connected to the electric grid and assign miles traversed as criteria to complete any given sentence. Upon 50% completion of sentence, offer opportunity to transition from miles to whatever chosen

trade/discipline/profession he/she purports a desire to pursue, with measurable results necessary to proceed, otherwise, offender does “all the miles”.

Firstly, it is clear that of all populations of offenders other than the oldest, most decrepit and those diagnosed with schizophrenia, mood and personality disorders, each specialized population can pedal a bicycle-be they a juvenile or a women, gang affiliated or child molester, drug addicted or drug dependant, etc and some may even enjoy it as it could provide unintended vehicle for some to dispel some rage or other predilections while improving prospects for every offenders mental health to be positively affected by granting them some autonomy/agency over completing their sentences. For over 30 years there has been evidence that mental health would improve with exercise. Per a 1990 article in “Sports Medicine”, John S. Raglin writes “in the case of long term exercise programmes, improvements in the mental health of ‘normal’ individuals are either modest in magnitude or do not occur, whereas the changes for those with elevated anxiety or depression are more pronounced. Evidence from studies involving clinical samples indicates that the psychological benefits associated with exercise are comparable to gains found with standard forms of psychotherapy. Hence, for healthy individuals the principal psychological benefit of exercise may be that of prevention, whereas in those suffering from mild to moderate emotional illness exercise may function as a means of treatment.” More recently, in a review article in “Meritus”, titled “Exercise and Mental Health”, the authors conclude “It is clear that exercise improves mental well-being and is

a viable preventative or adjunct treatment option for improved mental health outcomes.” In addition, those who are immediately held for trial can begin their journey imminently as could those who could not provide security for release yet know their crime may very well be proven and sentence imposed. If innocent, courts should take the loss and provide commensurate compensation (perhaps a multiple of produced value) for those unduly held for trial, yet were found not guilty. That would allow those unjustly held without means to be better than even they were before they entered our reconceived system. Perhaps it would’ve alleviated such travesties as the recent kid held at Rikers Island who was jailed in solitary confinement and allegedly repeatedly assaulted for dropped charges related to a stolen backpack-he later committed suicide. If only he could have “banked” miles till he could pay his own bail as family failed to provide...

Moreover, in terms of the unbelievably massive issue of post-release parole, and those serving probation, this proposal commits that once offender pays penalty of whatever sanction is determined to be “payment of his/her debt to society”, other than those convicted of criminal assault on a child (the most innocent and vulnerable amongst us thereby warranting further surveillance), all the follow up with probationers’ family, friends, psychologists, employers, and random drug/alcohol tests, cease. Certainly each crime shall be served consecutively to truly aspire at an attempt to repay society but the intended goal of this proposal is that the offender would seek an opportunity to earn a way out in a more productive manner. In order to facilitate a transition to this alternative, those currently required to report to probation officers could be given a choice between completing their remaining term of probation with all present conditions

or enter into a commensurate term of miles with a similar release plan (ie. ankle bracelets). For those parolees who fail to report to their assigned officers, which is the number one reason for parole revocation, officers having a more manageable caseload could better pursue violations with enforcement more effectively. For those who choose the alternative, there would be biking centers housing the probation officers where they could touch base with those compliant with sentencing conditions as a simple card swipe would alert them when one of their cases began to bike. It seems apparent, a larger percentage of paroled/probationary offenders would be more likely to report to a bicycle center to complete their sentence of miles if they weren't subjected to such personal interrogations into their lives as they attempt to reintegrate back into society. Interviews could take place while the offender is bicycling if/when warranted to help offender remain on track with life options previously chosen and pursued within prison confines.

Perhaps, for the juvenile population, we'd consider the sentence to be a proportion of a full sentence based upon age when offense occurred. Certainly, for those in this population, the most resources would be filtered, far beyond the basics the adult population receives. Though studies would be prudent perhaps assigning 5% of adult miles for 10yr old, 15%/11yo, 25%/12yo, 35%/13yo, 45%/14yo, 55%/15yo, 70%/16yo, 85%/17yo, 100%/18yo. But for the adult population, any perks and privileges bestowed upon them should be contingent upon offenders doing $\frac{1}{2}$ the required miles/KW each day. (Note: this would result in the noncompliant offender serving 2x the expected time an average paced offender would serve). That will ensure an incentive is always in place for the offender to embark in some form of self improvement, if not for society or his/her victim, then for his/her own self-interest or sanity

(mental health, it was noted, takes a dive for many after imprisonment). This requirement may foster a habit and that may be our best chance of changing long-term behavior. No minimum miles-no yard, cake, playing cards, tv, "common areas", etc. It would seem that the most incorrigible will never change or get better so may they wallow, if they must, in their cells. Though they will receive "credit" for ½ day worth of miles.

For crimes related to possession/distribution, prostitution/solicitation, gambling/booking, which mostly harm the offender themselves while also punishing the uniquely American entrepreneurial criminal, as long as these laws are on the books, they should pay commensurate penalty but with opportunity to transition after 25% of penalty paid as they'll have much need of behavior modification (all three are subject to addictive tendencies-not just substance abuse/dependency) before they're able to pursue occupational opportunities. However, if they fall short of rehabilitation, they will be required to complete the full sentence. Unless, of course, they are able to maintain the pace of miles while working on their addiction/vice to justify receiving occupational opportunities commensurate with their abilities.

When it comes to the logistical issues of rural jails or other holding facilities, which are severely underfunded and understaffed, as part of a greater proposal, newer, larger facilities, housing more than the 6000 inmates that some county jails now have, would be prudent to minimize expenses associated particularly with offender transport and oversight as these facilities would be connected for remote hearings, depositions, trials (for non-serious crimes), and even health checks. Furthermore, it may prove that an upscale small community could receive all of its power directly from the facility which may foster more advocacy for one and less

NIMBY. Conversely, in a poorer, more populous neighborhood, community members may receive the equivalent of 1 week or 1 month of their annual electricity bill exempt from payment or perhaps a monthly “prison production” credit applied to their bill to ever remind the community of their impact on the least of society and the least of society’s impact upon them. In terms of the ideal location, consider ruralish grounds such as found at the old Pilgrim hospital facility or perhaps, in more populous areas such as the latte sipping parts of Lloyd's Neck? Save the earth and reform inequalities amongst their citizenry-win/win. And if the program ultimately delivers on its desired effect, perhaps a former offender or two will join their ranks once their sentence is served as incentives for self improvement would provide the offender with the means by which reparations would be made to their victims. Also, given the seemingly innate ability for offenders to rig up different contraptions for their own benefit within prison, primarily weaponry but also managing to ferment fruits and such, one would expect some or one of them would even suggest methods for improving the electricity generating capacity of these facilities and some might even win the Tour De France bringing the unfathomable praise of a nation down on the formerly forgotten fugitives. Perhaps facilities could compete in a good natured way for most production, most miles, most compliance, most positive result, etc...

Though the cost savings alone would be a strong incentive for such a proposal to be considered, the effect it could have on the offender population's mental health should merit further study as well, as has been seen, exercise is one possible remedial solution for this crisis. Per “Introduction to Corrections”, (pg. 326) James D.J.& Glaze shows that approximately 5% of incarcerated have had overnight observation prior to incarceration, so it would seem for the

vast majority of inmates (~95%), the population's mental health would be markedly improved with such a policy. Since we, as a society, have come to idea of rehabilitation rather than simply applying corporal punishment for bad behavior, (this paper hasn't argued for or against punishment alone as a valued solution) within these guidelines, there is certainly ample room for offender to make his time behind bars as productive as possible or allow for him/her to continue to waste their time and society's taxes as is the current state of affairs. Certainly, we, as a society, seek justice for harms done upon our common citizenry but unless we're to dispose of these human beings as incorrigible or expendable, a new vision of what it means to repay a debt to society, protecting citizens from reoffense while preparing offenders to become productive members of society in order to make reparations to their victims is beyond debate.

In terms of expected output generation of electricity, suffice it to say that the facilities electric would be fully provided by the prisoner/probationers pedal power but to extrapolate some potential totals, from ecofriend.com, quoting Jay Wheelan CEO and founder of Green Revolution "a year's workouts on 20 of these bikes could deliver enough power to light up 72 homes for a month". Though time is not given for a "workout", a common workout period would be ½ hour to 1 ½ hours so, to simplify, we will use 1 ¼ hours as a benchmark with offenders allocated 15 mins break between 5 workouts a day. It follows, rather than 20 bikes with 1 workout/day, we'll use 4 bikes with 5 workout/day that would run 6 homes/yr. So 4000 bikes would run 6000 homes each year. Building even larger facilities and 8000 bikes would support 12000 homes which is significantly more than the prison population produces "serving time". Offenders could choose whether they pedal at a slower pace and skip breaks, pedal through as

fast as they wish or anything in between such as doing more than daily pace to get out before "normal pace" time. These figures are provided just to show the potential impact on the greater community such a proposal would have although sanctions should require more sessions than 5/day. Calculating the total output needed to complete a days required minimum at 150/miles per day which is biking for 10/hrs a day at 15MPH, a brisk but not too strenuous pace. If they do 200mi/day, they'll get out in $\frac{3}{4}$ the time. 300mi/day out in $\frac{1}{2}$ the time. As in life writ large, we all enter into a compact that each shall contribute to and receive from the common good of the community-a commensurate reciprocity. Many offenders have failed to learn this vital lesson of life and would benefit greatly though the lesson may be harsher for them than for others-JUSTICE. So again, until we decide we'll just dispose of the incorrigible, we should continue to pursue justice-for all.

References

- 1) PubMed.gov "Exercise and mental health. Beneficial and detrimental effects" J S Raglin.
Sports Med. 1990 June.
- 2) Ecofriend.com "Best electricity generating bikes" Dr. Prem, date published unknown
- 3) Maturitas, Vol. 106, December 2017, pg 48-56 "Exercise and mental health" Kathleen Mikkelsen, Vasso Apostolopoulos, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2017.09.003>
- 4) Introduction to Corrections, Robert D. Hanser-3rd edition, pg. 326, table 12.1 "Recent Symptoms and History of Mental Health Problems Among Prison and Jail Inmates".

